

DEVIL TAKE THE HINDMOST...

#1

Published for the F.A.P.A. by A. Langley Searles

Because of the transformation of Fantasy Commentator into a semi-subscription fan magazine---meaning simply that I hope to retain the publication in the F.A.P.A. mailings, although I am also aiming for a subscription list recruited from non-members---personal opinions and allied chatter really has no place in it any longer. Hence this flimsy affair, which will be used, as the occasion dictates, for the voicing of such material. I hope it's needless to say that I pretend to speak for no one except myself, and that the responsibility for anything and everything that follows should be laid at my door alone.

---oOo---

Strange as it may seem to Francis T. Laney and Forrest J. Ackerman, my remark in Commentator #2 concerning obscene matter in the mailings is but a corollary to a past v-p decision on this matter---one which both of the above individuals may find in The Fantasy Amateur for March, 1944, page three:

Another matter which has been brought before me is the question of obscene or smutty material in fanzines intended for FAPA circulation. My decision is that while the OE has no power to reject on his own authority, nevertheless if he submit samples of the doubtful publication to the other officers, and all four unanimously agree that the said publication should not be included, then it shall be barred from the mailing. Otherwise it shall be included, providing it complies with postoffice regulations.

The italics are mine. My statement concerning turning material over to the Postmaster General is, really, superfluous---though I intended it as a warning to the few members (e. g., Ackerman and Crutch) who have been responsible for most of the illegal obscene matter up to now, and to the officers, as a reminder that a v-p decision has made it illegal to circulate material frowned on by the P.O. I think it is definitely unfair for a few members to risk the safety of the whole organization, simply because of their desire to distribute in this manner either outrightly obscene matter or that which has been purposely made as salacious as possible without (?) crossing the borderline.

What, indeed, is Laney complaining about? Obviously, he still thinks that, regardless of Federal or state Statutes on the matter, it is infringing on his personal publishing rights if someone points out what the law on the matter actually says. As a F.A.P.A. member, it is Laney's duty to abide by the above-v-p decision, whether he likes to or not. If he doesn't like it, let him write to his Congressmen---state and national---and suggest that postal obscenity laws be revised to suit his own personal tastes. After all, I suppose the great FTL is, in actuality, a far better judge and a better-informed authority on such matters than are those who authored the regulations in the first place...

My own personal opinion on the obscenity question is simply this: if a fellow wishes to distribute, under his own name and frank, anything obscene, that is his own affair. Personally, I don't care for such material; but for those who do ---chacun à son gout. Only the actual publisher risks his neck. But in the F. A.P.A., it's another story: 64 necks are on the block beside the original offen-

der's. Laney and Ackerman may consider this fair, but I do not. Nor, apparently, did Chauvenet when he made the decision on the question. It should not seem at all surprising to anyone that the attacks on my stand have come from the West Coast---the origin of most obscene matter in the past.

Prono to judge others' actions by their own, a few noisy fans have sneered at my statement, "I am not setting myself up as an authority, but merely passing along questionable material to one who is." Odd as it may seem to them, and to Laney in particular, that's a fact: I honestly do not believe that I---or anyone who, like myself, has not studied the legal aspects of the subject---can possibly consider himself an authority. If in doubt, why not consult someone who is an authority? According to the v-p decision already referred to, that is exactly what an OE would have to do---else how could he ever know for certain the precise legal status of a borderline case?

Undoubtedly there are indeed Federal and state statutes which are not completely satisfactory. But these laws have been put there by a majority vote either of the people themselves or their elected representatives---a method that is unquestionable democratic. And by this same means they may, if felt desirable, be repealed. Laney, it seems, disagrees; read this statement, from the latest Fan-Dango:

In the first place, as should be well known to all of us, the narrow minded and puritanical standards of a pack of moronic public "servants" are scarcely those which any civilized being would care to adopt.

This is little more than an appeal to a superiority complex which Laney, it seems, believes prevalent in fandom. Frankly, I doubt very much if any except Laney do consider themselves universally superior to all elected public servants. Other than this, look at the tacit assumptions this statement necessitates:

- (1) our public servants are moronic.
- (2) public servants are not civilized human beings.
- (3) the standards of these public servants are narrow minded and puritanical.

Notice also the sly insinuation "it should be well known to all of us..." If that does not contradict all laws of honest, logical, above-board argument, I've missed my guess very badly. Laney in reality is speaking only for himself, nor can he, in my opinion, hope to win converts to his views by such specious tactics. I chose this particular quotation for comment because it seems to me pretty much representative of FTL's arguments in toto. Laney assumes that HE is speaking for all fans, that HE is universally right in all his views, that HE is the final authority on any question that may arise in fandom. I don't think he is.

Those who read McSnoyd's Bulletin, in this special mailing, may recall Laney's admitting in a letter to Raymond Washington that he attacked Washington as "immature" again and again "so that the catchword would become subconsciously implanted in the mind of Fandom." The same tactics have been used against me, Laney utilizing a "dictator" label to accomplish a similar end. Exactly what is dictatorial about a fan's pointing out a recognized law both Laney and Ackerman have been very careful to avoid mentioning.

Since a writer is hardly a competent judge of his own writings, I cannot say if Laney's and Daugherty's accusation of my own being tainted with an air of completely superiority is undeniably justified. Certainly---as personal acquaintances will, I think, testify---I am not "one of those people who feels so marvelously superior to the rest of us that he thinks we are receiving a vast and mighty boon when we are permitted to associate with him." Nor do I honestly believe I am possessed of "delusions of grandeur," as FTL puts it. When I write an article for publication, it is certainly true that I endeavor to give it a n

authoritative ring, and I think this is justified, for I spend a good deal of time in preparative research, oft-times, and would not in any event write something unless I were certain of my ground. But there is certainly a difference between being superior and being authoritative...

I also resent generalizations like "Searles, apparently, likes scarcely anything." While many of my remarks concerning F.A.P.A. publications have indeed been acid, it is equally true that a good many have been complimentary, too. Just for the fun of it--as well as for the record---I reviewed those given in the "Devil Take the Hindmost---" column in Commentator :1. The result: no less than nine 'zines were praised outright; eight were criticized strongly; and seven had descriptive comments pertaining little to quality. Laney's accusation is thus seen to be an outright falsehood.

To criticize another FAPAzine because I do not like it has never seemed to me such a startling innovation that I needed to justify my doing it; but I gather from the remarks in Fan-Dango that while it is perfectly proper for Laney to do so (as he has in the past), I, on the other hand should not.

Ackerman's attack I have said little about; this is simply because Ackerman is always attacking somebody, always, from time to time, boycotting someone who has not wished to accede to his whims, always indulging in a welter of noisy juvenile chatter. It was not for nothing that Lovecraft once said of him: "...he evidently enjoys verbal pyrotechnics for their own sake..." or that Derleth once wrote that he "has the unpleasant habit of trying to make everything over into his own image." Better men than I have characterized Forry, and I have no intention of being repetitious in this respect.

When all the puns and tricks of word and phrase are separated from his Yngvi---1944, there is actually little left. Forry has been very careful to imply rather than to accuse directly, to infer rather than state, and otherwise to demonstrate how adept he is at the art of telling a lie without soiling his lips in the process. The only matter worth commenting on is this:

I have long regarded fandom as a society synchronized with space and time, a world unto itself.... ...we don't need any outside referees. We need no recourse to law.

What Ackerman seems not to realize is the fact that fandom can no more isolate itself from the rest of society than can the United States isolate itself from the rest of the world. I think it's a damned sad thing to contemplate people being killed for the very principle that Forry---khali-clad though he is---evidently does not wish to uphold. To see this brand of isolationism cropping up when, indeed, most people consider the matter settled once and for all, is little short of disgusting. No one has ever questioned whether we need referees; the referees are there---you can't run away and hide. Most people are agreed that playing ostrich isn't feasible. A far more important question than "Who wants to be the first coward?" is, to my mind, "Who wants to be the second isolationist?"

As for the boycotting angle, Ackerman is still the only one doing it. Laney, on talking matters over with Russell, has renigged.

---oOo---

I'd like to talk a bit about Laney's remarks concerning the "Great Bib." On page nine of the latest Fan-Dango he says:

Louis C. Smith...volunteered to act as coördinator for the entire project... This led Sam Russell and myself to contemplate the book section of the list. We wrote Smith and A.L. Searles on the subject. For a number of reasons (including Searles' high-handed attitude towards FAPA censorship, and

his tendency to look down his nose at anyone save himself)
it will be impossible to collaborate with him.

This mendacious glossing-over of facts needs a bit of amplification. Firstly, I began publication of the biblio about two years ago, and I believe, whatever its admitted faults, that it is the best accomplishment along such lines to date. I have received from those fans in a position to cooperate but negligible assistance; save for Rosenblum, Koenig, Eshbach, Evans and a few others, no fan with a large book-collection has been of much help. Neither Ackerman nor Laney, for example, has contributed a single iota of help.

Now, apathy of fans towards projects is well known, and it is not at this that I am directing any complaint. But, once the project got rolling, and enough of it had been issued to prove it to be a good thing, immediately Laney decides to muscle in on the work. He wrote me in September, saying that "the LA gang" wished to "take over" the bibliography of books. His excuse was that my work had completely stopped. It had not, of course, although outside work had unfortunately seriously cut down my output.

Laney was informed of this latter fact. I also stated that before I would collaborate with anyone else, I wished to know what contribution of work I would receive. Having nursed along this project in spare time for several years I scarcely would wish to toss it out in the dark at a moment's notice. Could LA fans bring it out more quickly than I? Did they have facilities equal to those of local libraries in this city, and were they acquainted with the research methods that had to be used? Other queries were put, besides.

Laney never bothered even to answer these.

Personally, I do not like the slow rate at which the bibliography has been appearing any more than its receivers do. And if throwing in my lot with Laney and the rest would have assured a decent job done more quickly, I would have done so. Now I read that Laney finds it "impossible" to cooperate. All well and good, if he does not. But I definitely think it both unfair and unethical for Laney and his co-workers, if any, to use what work I have so far published as the basis for a competing bibliography. Laney has specifically, in a letter to Louis Smith, stated that he plans to revise and reissue that portion of my work that has so far appeared---and in my files is the carbon copy of this letter.

I believe that previous work in this section of the field entitles me to prior claim therein. I have decided, moreover, that I do not wish to turn over my work to Laney, who has shown himself uninterested in the project until an opportunity to take it over, lock, stock and barrel, apparently arose; nor to a fan such as he, who, when approached by Unger to publish the bibliography in September, 1943, said in reply (and I quote):

I hope you know I'm not interested in taking this job.

Not interested until Boucher (a professional) had recommended a "Great Eib" project; or until the ground had been broken for him by someone else; or until our mutual differences of opinion on other topics gave him an excuse to attack me, claim a lack of cooperation, and thus to launch competitive material.

As it happens, Laney's action is directly contrary to the NFFF constitution, which specifically protects by "copyright" projects already begun. This breach of ethics will not, of course, bother FTL; he has already, in a recent attack on the organization's policies (November Shangri-L'Affaires) laid the basis for a withdrawal from this group should conditions deem it necessary.

I think the bibliographical field is a wide-open one. There seems no need to me for one fan to muscle in on another's staked-out territory. So much in the field has been literally untouched---does not Laney possess the ability to

find his own original ground and work there? Need he play claim-jumper to others?

What do you think?

---oOo---

After perusing the latest Fan-Dango, I got the inescapable impression that PTL, by his own admission, is the only normal individual in all of fandom. Everyone else, almost without exception, is unsocial, badly introverted, and sex starved. It's almost surprising, when you come to think of it, that we've been able to live, even, this long. We're repressed "as a bunch of star Sunday school addicts"; we are "scared to death of our own emotional reactions"; we hide "in a fog of fanzines."

Golly, we're certainly a bunch of misguided chappies, aren't we?

Well, don't worry boys; as long as we have our "normal" F.T.Lancy on hand, we can't go wrong; he'll tell us what we should do, how fandom should be run, what's wrong with us, what we do, and our F.A.P.A., state, and federal constitution...

---oOo---

I have a few happier topics to cover before signing off. By dint of correspondence with those F&PA members who have shown their interest in the book-a-page project of Michael Rosenblum's to the extent of commenting thereon interestedly in their publications, the differences of opinion existing between the format used by Michael and that of my own have been ironed out. By consensus of the majority of opinions given me, the following format now holds:

- (1) author's name should be in the upper LEFT corner, thus conforming with standard library procedure.
- (2) the length of the "synopsis" and "review" sections shall be entirely up to the personal preference of the fan who is writing the page; indeed, they may be combined into one heading, as has been done by Mr. Onderdonk in his review in the current Commentator. The essential features of both headings should, however, be retained.
- (3) Until a sound decimal classification is finally decided upon, room for its addition should be left in the upper RIGHT corner; as a supplement (and, until the decimal system is finally adopted) a few words of general classification should be appended in the upper right corner, two or three lines down.

The reviews in Commentator #5 (this mailing) are correct in these respects with the exception that the latter part of point three has been omitted. Use these, then, as models for format with this exception. And I hope that all interested members will get into the project. It is one which demands cooperation from everyone interested---it can't be hogged by a few.

The distribution system is not finally decided upon. If you have any ideas on this point, please air them...

---oOo---

In the current Commentator, reprint acknowledgements to the articles by Ibenig and Merritt were inadvertently omitted from "This-'n'-That." My apologies, gentlemen. "As I See It..." appeared originally in the Denvention issue of FFF weekly; "Little Men, What Now?" in the first Reader and Collector and the 2nd New Fandom. Reprints or not, I hope you like them...

Stencilled 12/6/44

